



## Field Report

# Creating a local food procurement community of practice: The Alberta Flavour Learning Lab

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## Abstract

In order for local food initiatives (LFIs) to have a transformative effect on the larger food system, greater levels of economic, organizational, and physical scale are needed. One way for LFIs to reach the scale necessary to generate a more significant impact is through increased institutional procurement of local foods. But how do people and organizations come together to generate the social infrastructure required to shift food purchasing practices and processes? This field report shares the story of an innovative community of practice consisting of institutional food buyers, large-scale distributors, regional retailers, processors, producers, researchers, and municipal and provincial government representatives within the Edmonton city-region that formed for the express purpose of “creating a positive community impact by getting more local foods on more local plates”. In describing the formation and first three years of the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab we examine the unique characteristics of this community of practice that has aided the development of a common framework for learning, understanding, and joint action. In addition to the accomplishments to date, we also discuss the challenges faced by the Learning Lab and the strategies used to overcome them.

**Keywords:** Institutional procurement; local food; community of practice; social infrastructure

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## Introduction

Canada's agri-food system is embedded in, and shaped by, global market forces (e.g., transnational corporations, global trade agreements), and national and provincial policies (e.g., food safety, land use) that favour an industrial approach to production, processing, and distribution (Clapp, 2014; Clapp & Fuchs, 2009; Qualman, 2011; Winson, 1993). Concerns about the impacts of the dominant, industrialized food system on the environment, health, and local communities have shaped the emergence of a wide range of local food initiatives (LFIs) in Canada and elsewhere. LFIs can be characterized by their focus on locally controlled, shortened supply chains, responding to local supply and demand, and "conditioned by local community norms, values and culture" (Lyson, Gilbert, Gillespie, & Hilchey, 1995, p. 108). Re-localizing food can create opportunities for new and strengthened relationships to form amongst various actors along the supply chain. The networks formed by these dynamic and diverse interactions are creating spaces for "synergies to be built around food and environmental quality, social capital and the economic viability of producers" (Beckie, Kennedy & Wittman, 2012, p. 333). In this way, these LFIs are part of global social movements that are advocating for more locally embedded, environmentally sustainable, and socially just food systems (Hinrichs, 2003; Wittman, Desmarais & Wiebe, 2010).

Despite the growing number of LFIs in recent years, their overall role in the larger food system remains limited; economically, they represent only a small percentage of total food sales (e.g., Beckie, 2016; Beckie, Kennedy & Wittman, 2012). In order for LFIs to have a more significant and transformative effect on the larger food system, greater levels of economic, organizational, and physical scale are needed (Cleveland, Müller, Tranovich, Mazaroli, & Hinson, 2014; Mount, 2012). One potent way to stimulate the scaling up of LFIs is through institutional procurement (e.g., schools, universities, hospitals) of locally produced and processed foods (Friedmann, 2007; Morgan & Morley, 2014; Morgan & Sonnino, 2013; Reynolds & Hunter, 2017). Increasing the percentage of local food purchased by large-scale institutions can generate economies of scale that foster increased production, along with improvements in processing and distribution. There are, however, a number of challenges for institutions assuming this role and adopting new practices. These challenges present both within the organization and externally due to the nature of the dominant supply chains and other systemic barriers (Friedmann, 2007; Morgan & Sonnino, 2010; Reynolds & Hunter, 2017).

Recent research suggests that social infrastructure (referring to relationship, networks, values, and governance, etc.) plays an important role in addressing challenges related to the development of LFIs (Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Flora & Bregendahl, 2012). One approach for establishing social infrastructure is through the development of communities of practice (CoPs), in which groups of diverse individuals with similar interests meet, on an ongoing basis, for the purpose of shared learning and understanding, and for joint action (Lave & Wenger, 1998).

In this field report we describe an innovative and collaborative approach to scaling up LFIs. The Alberta Flavour Learning Lab was formed over three years ago as a local food

procurement CoP consisting of institutional food buyers, large-scale distributors, online-retailers, processors, producers, researchers, and municipal and provincial government representatives within the Edmonton city-region. The Learning Lab's express purpose is "creating a positive community impact by getting more local foods on more local plates". In describing the Learning Lab, we highlight the unique characteristics that have aided the development of a common framework for learning, understanding and joint action.

We begin by first providing a brief overview of the principles of Community of Practice (CoP) and social learning upon which the Learning Lab was established. Here, we also discuss the importance of social infrastructure to the development of LFIs. Next, we describe the initial years of the Learning Lab: establishment of the CoP (2014); collective goal setting and accomplishments (2015); collective goal setting and accomplishments (2016/2017). Next, we discuss lessons learned by reviewing the challenges of developing this CoP and how they were overcome. In conclusion, we reflect on the overall experience of developing the Learning Lab.

## Communities of Practice: social infrastructure for learning and innovation

Scholars argue that a shift towards sustainable food system practices is only possible through profound personal and social changes (e.g., Kerton & Sinclair, 2010; Lankester, 2013; Tarnoczi, 2011). This view is bolstered by evidence suggesting that social infrastructure (e.g., relationships, networks, values, governance) is a critical, yet often neglected, aspect of LFI development (Connelly & Beckie, 2016; Flora & Bregendahl, 2012; Flora & Flora, 1993). Physical infrastructure (e.g., storage, processing and distribution facilities, retail space) is often associated with large capital investments and high financial risk; whereas social infrastructure generally requires significantly lower capital input, instead focusing on building relationships and creating a social space where participants can learn together, sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources, leading to a development and diffusion of innovations (Beckie et al., 2012; Connelly & Beckie, 2016). Engaging actors from different sectors and perspectives to participate in building social infrastructure can lead to more impactful collective efforts to transform the dynamics of existing systems (Smith & Seyfang, 2013). But how do people and organizations come together to generate the social infrastructure required to shift practices and processes? Communities of Practice (CoP) are one promising path. CoPs were conceptualized by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the 1990s as part of their work on social learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1998).

CoPs are formed by groups of people who seek to deepen their knowledge and expertise in a shared area of interest by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, 2000; Wenger, McDermott & Synder, 2002). Through CoPs, people with diverse perspectives and experiences can come together to develop a common framework for learning, understanding, and joint action (Schusler, Decker & Pfeffer, 2003). CoPs facilitate critical reflection of one's own and others'

assumptions of the world, an important aspect of learning about and adopting practices that support more sustainable outcomes (Lankester, 2013).

**Table 1: Timeline of Activities for the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab**

<i>February 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First meeting; participants unanimously agree to continue to meet as a group</li> </ul>
<i>Summer 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northlands receives two-year grant from McConnell Foundation’s Institutional Food Program to support development of a local food procurement community of practice</li> </ul>
<i>Fall/Winter 2014</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members agree to overarching goal of “creating positive community impact by getting more local foods on more local plates”</li> <li>• Defined “local food” within the Alberta context</li> <li>• Began inventorying local food products currently available through distributors or being sourced directly from producers or processors</li> <li>• Learning resources made available: guest speakers, reports and online sources</li> </ul>
<i>Fall 2015</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northlands receives additional two years of grant funding from Alberta Livestock and Meat Association (ALMA) to support the Learning Lab</li> <li>• Partnered with U of A on a five-year Measurement and Evaluation study as part of the FLEdGE (Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged) research project</li> <li>• Began local food tours</li> <li>• Identify priorities for next three years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Annual measurement and evaluation of local food procurement</li> <li>○ Recognition and celebration of accomplishments</li> <li>○ Local food products familiarization</li> <li>○ Marketing</li> <li>○ Group expansion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Summer 2016</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created one video on the Learning Lab and two videos on local food producers<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Northlands secures matching funding from Mitacs to hire two research interns</li> </ul>
<i>Fall 2016</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AB Flavour marketing toolkit created and made available<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• First Mitacs PhD intern begins facilitating the Learning Lab and researching the development of the CoP</li> <li>• Northlands launches Alberta Flavour Twitter account and website</li> <li>• Measurement and evaluation baseline research (2015) begins</li> <li>• Economic impact assessment study contracted to a consultant</li> <li>• “Meet the Maker” added to meetings</li> </ul>
<i>Winter 2016/2017</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Mitacs PhD intern begins assisting with Alberta Flavour communications and online resources</li> <li>• Strategic planning and “strategic action map” created for 2017 and beyond</li> <li>• Measurement and Evaluation 2015 baseline study completed.</li> <li>• Members sign off on terms of reference and pledge of commitment and confidentiality</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8Odc-GDIEk>; <http://temp-albertaflavour.nationbuilder.com/downloads>

<sup>2</sup> <http://temp-albertaflavour.nationbuilder.com/downloads>

Reflexive learning, through trial and error and collective problem solving, is a key characteristic of resilient food systems that can adapt to changing needs and circumstances (Braun & Bogdan, 2016). CoPs have been increasingly adopted by communities and organizations as a way to share and build knowledge that can address common issues and goals. In the following section we describe the formation and development of one such CoP, the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab.

## Development of the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab (2014 – 2017)

The activities and accomplishments of the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab, from the first meeting in February, 2014 to March, 2017, are summarized in Table 1 and described further in the following sub-sections.

### *2014 - Establishing the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab*

In February 2014, a number of representatives from public institutions, large-scale food distributors, local food retailers, and producers situated in the Edmonton city-region were invited to a meeting coordinated and hosted by Northlands Agricultural Society of Alberta. The purpose of the meeting was to scope out the level of interest in forming a group focused on scaling up local food distribution and institutional procurement in the Edmonton Capital Region. Northlands was looking for new ways to contribute to the region's agricultural sector and contracted the third author to provide expertise and leadership in developing strategies for Northlands to support the growing local food movement in the province. Institutional procurement was identified as an important strategy and one that Northlands could play a key role in leading. A senior planner from the City, who had been involved with the development of the Edmonton Food and Agriculture Strategy (Beckie, Hanson, & Schrader, 2013), co-facilitated the meeting.

The invitation to the meeting stated:

Getting more local food on more plates . . . let's talk! The City of Edmonton and Northlands are bringing together local institutions and food service organizations that are buying local food or want to buy more local food. Please join us for an informal workshop, where we can get to know one another, explore what we collectively know, examine the challenges and successes of local food in Alberta.

Invitations were sent to food buyers, chefs, and foodservice managers from Alberta Health Services, the University of Alberta, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), the Shaw Conference Center, and Northlands' Expo Conference Center. The third author understood

the importance of having other stakeholders from along the supply chain present, so invitations were also sent to Sysco and Gordon Food Services (GFS), two major food distributors, as well as to representatives from Alberta’s Department of Agriculture and Forestry, local food retailers, and agricultural producers. The first author was also invited to take part in the meeting to determine the role research could potentially play in the development of this group. By the end of this first meeting, there was unanimous support for continuing to meet as a group focused on exploring ways to ‘create a positive community impact by getting more local food on more local plates’ (September 4, 2014 Alberta Flavour Meeting notes). The group was initially identified as the Local Food Working Group and was later named the Alberta Flavour Learning Lab.

With support for continued meetings, (the third author) applied for, and was awarded, a two-year grant by the McConnell Foundation to support Learning Lab activities. Throughout 2014, meetings were held approximately every eight weeks for two hours and continued to be hosted by Northlands. Because of the intent to foster the development of a community of practice, meeting agendas were fairly open-ended, allowing members to determine how to best to learn from each other and what resources were needed. Meeting facilitation drew on the Art of Hosting and World Café methods in order to create a welcoming and interactive social space.

Early in the first year, it was recognized that developing an agreed-upon definition of local food was critical. After lengthy discussions, members of the Learning Lab decided that, similar to the provincial government’s definition, local food would be defined as “Alberta food”. Three criteria were identified as important to fostering positive community impact through changes in food procurement practices: 1) ingredients – farm and rural community impacts; 2) processing – supporting business investment and jobs; and 3) business ownership – supporting local entrepreneurs and increased economic impact. It was then decided that, for the purpose of the Learning Lab, two out of three of the criteria – Alberta produced, processed, and owned businesses – were needed for a food item to be identified as “Alberta Food”.

With a definition in place, the Learning Lab could begin to identify available local product. This was accomplished through two primary activities:

1. GFS and Sysco identified existing Stock Keeping Units (SKU)<sup>3</sup> that fit the shared definition of “local” and changed the structure of their inventory list accordingly.
2. Learning Lab participants provided a list of their local food providers through either direct or contracted relationships.

Over 1700 SKU’s and 20 direct trade relationships were identified as meeting the criteria of local food and these were aggregated into a spread sheet and shared among the participants. An annual survey is being developed to ensure that new products and producers are captured.

Also during 2014, meeting agendas evolved to include time for participants to share their successes and challenges, which allowed the organizers to identify gaps in the group’s understanding of the regional food system. These gaps were addressed through a variety of

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<sup>3</sup> SKU, or Stock Keeping Unit, is a number assigned to a product by the company for stock-keeping purposes and internal operations.

resources and learning opportunities, including guest speakers, field tours, and relevant documentary and online information. Guest speakers presented on a variety of topics, such as Edmonton’s food and agriculture strategy and Alberta’s Department of Agriculture and Forestry resources on locally focused production and marketing opportunities. Field tours were offered to enable members to gain firsthand knowledge of a diversity of local food businesses in the Edmonton city-region (e.g., commercial greenhouse, commercial bakery, organic goat dairy and processing plant, vegetable processor). In addition to Learning Lab members, chefs, food service staff, and others are invited to attend the field tours.

Other important milestones in 2014 included the development of two draft documents: a Terms of Reference and a Pledge of Commitment. The third author modeled these documents after those developed by the Healthy Food in Health Care (HFHC) program based in New England. These documents articulated the purpose, scope, and commitment to participation and confidentiality for members of the Learning Lab. These documents were refined over time and signed by Learning Lab members for the first time in 2017.

### *2015 - Collective goal setting and accomplishments*

With the foundation of the Learning Lab established during 2014, the group was able to begin identifying and accomplishing goals. In 2015 the following goals were developed:

- Recognize the successes of participants and of the group as a whole
- Measure the impact, on the local economy, of the group’s purchasing
- Create shared marketing materials
- Develop clear, agreed-upon metrics
- Increase the percentage of local products purchased
- Make the supply chain more transparent
- Profile producers and vendors
- Address some of the logistics of getting products from small local vendors
- Help suppliers understand how to sell to institutions and distributors

These goals, recognized by the Learning Lab as a work in progress, support the purpose of the Learning Lab (“creating a positive community impact by getting more local foods on more local plates”) by increasing local marketing channels for local producers and providing producers with opportunities to increase in scale. Development and marketing (e.g., website, social media) of the Alberta Flavour brand helps to raise the profiles of a number of local producers. Additionally, through achievement of the goals, shorter supply chain relationships are expanded and strengthened (i.e., producers – distributors – institutional and other buyers), particularly through direct sales.

In the fall of 2015, two additional milestones for the Learning Lab included receipt of additional funding and the initiation of measurement and evaluation on the Learning Lab's institutional procurement of local foods. The additional funding for the Learning Lab was awarded to Northlands by the Alberta Livestock and Meat Association (ALMA) and was used to support food tours and continued meetings. The measurement and evaluation was undertaken as a five-year project in partnership with the University of Alberta and FLEdGE. Baseline data on the institutional procurement of local foods was completed in 2016 and the Learning Lab will be monitoring progress of this and other impacts (i.e., accomplishment of strategic action items) over time.

### *2016/2017 – Collective goal setting and accomplishments*

In the fall of 2016, the Learning Lab entered into a series of strategic planning sessions. These sessions were pivotal in establishing goals and a plan of action for 2017 and beyond. Three priorities were identified: 1) *story telling* (both internal and external to the Learning Lab); 2) *measurement and evaluation*; and 3) *coordinating demand for local food*. Although identified and agreed upon quickly, the goals were broad and needed to be translated into clear actions. A “strategic action map” was created over the next two meetings detailing the actions through which the broad goals would be accomplished. Team leads and team members for each action were listed on the action map, which serves as a “living document” used to structure subsequent meetings. Similar to the previous set of goals, these also support local producers in establishing new local market channels and increasing in scale. Storytelling, in particular, continues to raise the profiles of a number of local producers, processors, and institutional initiatives through multiple communication outlets (i.e., website (<http://temp-albertaflavour.nationbuilder.com/>), social media (<https://twitter.com/albertaflavour?lang=en>), and presentations). For example, the twitter account produces 1460 tweets per year and has close to 3000 followers.

The Learning Lab evolved in three other significant ways during 2016/2017. After the strategic planning sessions, members recognized the need to meet more frequently (from every eight weeks to every six) and for a longer amount of time (from two to three hours). Second, a “Meet the Maker” component was added to each meeting, during which two or three regional producers introduce their businesses and provide food samples. Unlike food tours, which require several hours, Meet the Maker is a convenient way for food buyers to connect with local food producers and processors, hear about the development of their businesses, sample their products, and learn of their current and future capacity to sell to institutions, as well as the challenges they face in doing so. This information was also important to government representatives from the Explore Local division of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, who develop and deliver programs to assist farmers and processors working on local market development. Like the food tours, Meet the Maker was instrumental in building social infrastructure through both external and internal linkages.

The third way the Learning Lab developed was the addition of two research interns for two years. The internships were supported through matching funding from Northlands and Mitacs, a national, not-for-profit organization that partners universities, companies, and governments to support industrial and social innovation in Canada. One of the interns serves as the facilitator for the Learning Lab and is conducting research on the development of the CoP. The other Mitacs intern supports the development of the Learning Lab and of a broader regional food systems community of practice in Alberta by providing internal and external communications and online resources (e.g., website, social media, web-based community building). This intern will be conducting research on the network that is forming.

## Challenges and lessons learned

In addition to the many activities and accomplishments of the Learning Lab over the past three years, there have also been a number of challenges, predominantly centering on members' participation, the development of the community of practice, and the tendency to focus mostly on the economic criteria and impacts of institutional local food procurement. In this section, we discuss some of these key challenges and the strategies used to overcome them.

The first few Learning Lab meetings were marked with a degree of tension, stemming from the caution and uncertainty about members' level of commitment given the competitive and confidential nature of the food business. One comment raised during interviews with members, conducted by the second author, reflects the feelings of many during the early stages: "I'll participate in these meetings but I am not telling anyone how much I pay for carrots." This was told in a light-hearted manner and was used to contrast with the comparative ease that members have come to communicate with each other.

When asked what had increased trust within the group, members unanimously responded that it was the way in which the meetings were facilitated, which enabled relationships to develop on a personal level as well as on a professional level. Expert and intentional facilitation of the initial meetings was identified as a critical factor in moving members from viewing one another as competitors to identifying each other as colleagues working together towards common goals. The Art of Hosting techniques – "opening the circle" and "closing the circle" – are simple but effective ways of building personal relationships. Opening the circle involves starting the meeting with a question that includes a personal component (e.g., What was the best part of your weekend? What are one or two things in your life that mean the most to you lately?). Closing the circle is similar in design but focuses more on the meeting itself (e.g., What are your thoughts on today's meeting? What are one or two words that convey how you feel we are doing as a group?). Taking into account members' professional perspectives, importance was also placed on acknowledging and respecting individual organizational or business goals. Rather than framing the group solely as a means to scale up local food systems in order to contribute to the common good, the concept was also presented as an opportunity for each individual organization to

support their own needs and interests. At one of the early meetings, members were asked to write those interests and needs down, and they were used to inform the development of the Learning Lab's goals. Despite the initial emphasis on individual corporate cultures and needs, members of the Learning Lab started to see, over time, an alignment of their institution's values and needs with those of other members. Members also began to realize that it was only through working together that they could make a significant impact on scaling up local food.

Developing a shared language (i.e., definition of local food) and a shared vision for this community of practice was time-consuming and challenging, given the different perspectives represented by members. But these were essential for framing the focus and intent of the group, for maintaining group cohesiveness, and for providing important reference points for the activities and actions of the Learning Lab. Group cohesiveness was also facilitated by the development of the Terms of Reference, the Participant Pledge, and a non-disclosure agreement that helped to alleviate concerns about confidentiality. These documents clarified the rights and responsibilities of the members; for example, that there would be no disclosure of pricing or volumes purchased outside of the group. Over time, there was enough trust established that members were comfortable sharing purchasing volumes, supplier, and vendor information with each other.

To support more consistent participation, the Learning Lab shifted to having membership by individuals rather than by institutions. This means that individuals, instead of organizations, join the Learning Lab. Another lesson learned was to encourage multiple individuals from each organization to participate in the Learning Lab. This has been important for continued information sharing despite employment changes (i.e., taking a new position, maternity leave).

After a few meetings it became apparent that there were some significant gaps in basic knowledge about which foods are grown and processed within the region. Foodservice managers and procurement managers are not connected to the food system in the way that chefs or restaurant owners are. For many procurement managers, food is just a portion of what they are responsible for sourcing. Having a granular understanding, for example, of who grows potatoes in the volumes that are needed and at a price that institutions are willing to pay was recognized as being critical to increased purchasing of local foods.

Recognizing and overcoming this lack of knowledge highlights the importance of members learning to move beyond a deeply rooted belief that "local food" is both unavailable and cost prohibitive. Efforts to advance learning and knowledge about the diversity of products available include inviting local businesses to the meeting (Meet the Maker) to profile their products and to talk about the challenges they face in scaling up production (e.g., finding appropriate processing facilities, meeting food safety requirements). Another effort to strengthen knowledge was through tours to local food businesses. These field trips provide Learning Lab members with opportunities to see a range of food businesses first hand and to ask questions of the people who provide or can provide local foods for their organizations.

A final challenge of the Learning Lab has been a tendency to focus on the economic aspects of the institutional procurement of local foods relative to the environmental and social

aspects. The definition of local foods adopted by the Learning Lab did not include these dimensions of sustainability, for example, or standards related to animal husbandry. The Report on Institutional Food Procurement by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future identified this challenge as being common to the institutional procurement of local food: “Notably, the emphasis of institutions (on the procurement of local food) has been on criteria regarding the distance food has traveled, and has not taken into account aspects of production such as the structure and size, treatment of workers, health and environment” (Fitch & Santos 2016, p. 2) This is anticipated to be an ongoing challenge for the Learning Lab and for the majority of initiatives aimed at increasing the institutional procurement of local foods. However, efforts have been made to increase awareness and critical reflection within this CoP on the broad set of values and goals associated with the local food movement and to encourage the use of suppliers that address socio-economic and environmental sustainability criteria.

## Conclusion

Social infrastructure has been identified as playing a crucial role in the advancement of local food systems. This field report describes the development of social infrastructure through the establishment of a CoP consisting of institutional food buyers, large-scale distributors, on-line regional retailers, processors, producers, researchers, and municipal and provincial government representatives, who came together to “create positive community impact by getting more local foods on more local plates”. Through the use of a CoP framework, Alberta Flavour Learning Lab has been successful in: creating a new community of local food learners and leaders; increasing awareness of local food available in Alberta; increasing procurement of local food; increasing public awareness of institutional purchasing of local food; and supporting the development of a place-based food system. A segment of the meeting notes from the first strategic planning session, which took place November 2016, are telling of the Learning Lab’s progress as a group:

The overall feel of the planning session was energetic and engaged. Although we spent more time than originally planned on sharing of each organization’s activities and barriers related to local foods, this ended up bringing more value to the group than we had anticipated. This sharing time illuminated the agreed-upon goals for 2017 which centered on “story telling”. Learning Lab member organizations have done, or are in the process of doing, quite an impressive array of activities related to local food. There is much that we can learn from one another and there is also much that would be good to communicate to audiences outside of the group. By the end of the meeting, it was evident that the hard work of creating a foundation for this group has been done and done successfully! Now the group is ready to really push forward the

scaling up of institutional procurement of local food. (Meeting Notes, November 2016)

The Learning Lab has resulted in a number of systemic changes. Sysco and GFS now identify products in their inventory that are aligned with the Learning Lab's shared definition of "local foods". Working group members now view each other as colleagues that can support each other's success. Shifting from competitors to colleagues allows for cross-organization collaboration that would have never been possible without the relationships that have been developed through the Learning Lab. Another change, both individual and collective, has been increased understanding of the food system and the potential of institutional procurement to contribute to the scaling up of local food systems in Alberta. Participants are now able to articulate why purchasing more local food aligns with their organization's mandate and also creates benefits for local producers, businesses, and communities.

In addition to the Learning Lab achievements related to procurement, other developments have emerged through collaborations among the members that are contributing to local food system development more broadly. Alberta Health Services and Northlands have partnered to support the expansion of a local CSA by establishing a drop off for weekly produce boxes at one of the hospitals. Enrollment in the CSA has increased significantly through hospital staff membership. The Shaw Conference Centre has contracted Northland's beekeeper to add hives to their roof; the honey produced will be used by Shaw's chefs. These developments illustrate the ancillary benefits that emerge from the relationships that have formed in this CoP.

This field report contributes to the literature on social learning and CoP by providing evidence that participation of a diverse group of individuals in a focused and collective learning process can lead to the development of relationships of trust, the identification of common goals, and the creation and rapid diffusion of knowledge. This report also provides insights into the development of procurement practices that support the scaling of LFIs and their associated values and objectives. The Learning Lab provides an example of how economic transactions can be re-embedded in social networks (Seyfang, 2006; Larder, Lyons & Woolcock, 2014).

While acknowledging the achievements of the Learning Lab during its first three years, it is important to also recognize that, with this LFI still being in the early stage of development, the mission of "creating a positive community impact by getting more local foods on more local plates" has yet to be fully realized. In addition to incremental increases in local food purchases to date by the member institutions, there has been a tendency to focus on product price, availability and volume over social and environmentally sustainable criteria. Identification of this limitation during the recent measurement and evaluation study has led to critical reflection and dialogue about how to encompass a broader set of criteria when deciding upon local food purchases. While this challenge can be difficult and time consuming to address, the institutional members are open to finding ways to identify and incorporate social and environmental criteria. With the diversity of members involved in this CoP (institutions, academics, producers, retailers, distributors, and government representatives) it is hoped that the social infrastructure formed will

continue to provide fertile ground for learning about and increasing attention to all dimensions of a sustainable, local food system.

Changes in practice as a result of learning and innovation can shift the way participants interact with each other and with structures and institutions to transform the power dynamics of existing systems (Moulaert, Martinelli, Swyngedouw, & Gonzalez, 2005). Through their involvement in this CoP, public institutions have become aware of the role they can play, individually and collectively, in advancing local food systems through changes in procurement practices. Through learning and working together they have taken agency to do so. While these institutions are still predominantly dependent on large-scale distributors for most of their food purchases, they now have access to distributors' inventories that identify local food, as collectively defined, through collaborations formed within the Learning Lab. Additionally, through information gathered and exchanged within this CoP, institutions are pursuing and developing contracts directly with Alberta producers and processors.

Social learning has become a common theme of the food movement, as we seek to learn about and develop ways to improve the sustainability and resilience of the food system (Beckie, 2016). The relationship between learning and practice is an iterative one, and changes in practice taking place at the individual level are influenced by and can also influence communities of practice (Braun & Bogdan, 2016). By fostering the development of social infrastructure, through convening a diverse set of actors who have significant roles in shaping Edmonton's city-region food system, this initiative has seeded many relationships and activities that can contribute to influencing change in the food system in the years ahead.

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